



February 1, 2017

KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-17-26

SUBJECT: LTP–Regional Conservation Partnership Program–Fiscal Year 2017 Native Grazing Lands Protection in the Plains

Purpose: To provide guidance for administering financial assistance (FA) for fiscal year (FY) 2017 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Native Grazing Lands Protection in the Plains

Expiration Date: September 30, 2018

Background

The Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, is providing Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) FA and offering easements under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) through a 5 year RCPP agreement. This agreement will improve rangeland conditions for both grazing needs and habitat needs on eligible lands by preventing habitat fragmentation and conversion to non-grazing uses, improving wildlife habitat, and reducing the spread of invasive species.

Project Location

Fields located in the geographical areas shown in Attachment 1 will be considered for funding. A field is considered to be in the project area if any portion of the field is located in the project area.

EQIP Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, Conservation Practices, Application Priority, Additional Requirements, and Ranking Criteria.

Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, Conservation Practices, Application Priority, Additional Requirements, and Ranking Criteria are available in Attachment 2.

EQIP Allocation and Funding Decisions

The NRCS will distribute the project allocation in the Program Contracts System (ProTracts) RCPP-EQIP FY2017 subaccount “Native Grazing Lands Protection” on an incremental and as needed basis. Applications can now be taken on a continuous basis throughout the FY. Application evaluation cutoff date is set for **April 21, 2017**.

Immediately after the application evaluation cutoff date, applicants requiring eligibility determinations processed by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) (see Title 440-Conservation Program Manual (CPM), Part 512, Subpart C, Section 512.24) will be notified by mail with a Program Eligibility Certification Letter. A template letter can be found in ProTracts or 440-CPM, Part 512, Subpart J, Section 512.91.

The participant must file or update the required certifications within 30 days of receipt of this letter for NRCS to consider the application for funding. If eligibility status of the participant is not updated with the 30 day period, the application will be determined “ineligible.”

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DIST: A, F, S, Willhoft

If ineligibility is confirmed, the participant must be notified by certified mail using the “Ineligibility Determination for Conservation Program Contract Letter.” A template of this letter can be found in ProTracts or in 440-CPM, Part 512, Subpart J, Section 512.93. The application status in ProTracts must be changed to “ineligible”.

EQIP ProTracts Application Data

The following ProTracts application data entry is specific to this project:

- **Program**–“RCPP-EQIP 2014”
- **Application FY**–“2017”
- **Application Type**–“National”
- **FA Fund Code**–“Native Grazing Lands Protection”
- **Cost List**–“NGLP”

EQIP Deadlines

The following actions will be completed for all eligible applications by **April 24, 2017**:

- Application information entered in ProTracts:
 - Program
 - Application FY
 - Sign-up Date
 - Servicing Office
 - Location County
 - Applicant(s)
 - Application Status (pending, eligible, ineligible, or cancelled)
 - Fund Code
- Applications will be changed to “eligible” status if the following have been completed:
 - All participants entered in Protracts with:
 - Participant AGI certification flag “Y” in ProTracts
 - Participant HEL and WC certification flag “Y” in ProTracts
 - FTE certification flag “Y” in Protracts
 - Required DUNS entered in ProTracts
 - Vender information loaded matching 1199a with “Active” status vendor in ProTracts
 - Signature Authority documentation on file
 - All necessary control of land affidavits on file

Applications will remain in “pending” status until all participant and land eligibility requirements have been met. Applications not received by the application cutoff date will be left in “pending” status. Applications still in “pending” status after **May 22, 2017**, will not be considered for funding during this cutoff period.

Conservation plans will be uploaded to ProTracts and applications ranked in ProTracts by **May 22, 2017**. Applications not supported with a participant signed Application Ranking Summary by May 26, 2017 will be changed to “pending” status and not be considered for funding during the current cutoff period.

Application evaluation peer reviews will be completed by **May 26, 2017**. Assistant state conservationists for field operations (ASTC-FO) shall ensure that all application evaluations (rankings) are peer reviewed (per Title 440-CPM, Part 512, Subpart C, Section 512.25[C][2][iii]) prior to preapproval of applications.

Funding decisions will be completed by the EQIP program manager as soon as application peer review has been completed. All approved applications and contract documentation will be entered in the Document Management System (DMS) for second level review of obligation by **June 26, 2017**.

ASTCs–FO will ensure all contracts have been obligated in ProTracts by **July 21, 2017**.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)

Landowners interested in an Agricultural Land Easement within the project area will be referred to an eligible entity to initiate the application process. Applications for ACEP-ALE are a joint application submission process between the eligible entity (i.e., a land trust) and the landowner. The eligible entity will submit application form (NRCS-CPA-041) along with the landowner application form (NRCS-CPA-041A) for each parcel being considered for enrollment.

All landowners and entity landowner members will need to meet Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) provisions and Highly Erodible Land (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) compliance provisions to be eligible for a conservation easement. Field office staff will need to work with landowners to make sure that they are entered in the Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS) and have made AGI, HELC, and WC certifications with the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

State office staff will work with local field office staff to schedule and conduct a site visit and begin identifying resource concerns on the proposed parcel(s) for each application received. State office will determine eligibility based on the site visit and on information provided at time of application using the ACEP-ALE eligibility and ranking worksheets. Field office staff will provide conservation planning assistance for all approved applications for development of a conservation plan and any associated management plans needed for the Agricultural Land Easement Plan.

Contact: Forward questions through established channels to Joel A. Willhoft, Resource Conservationist, at (785) 625-2588 ext. 103 or by email to joel.willhoft@ks.usda.gov.

(signed)

ERIC B. BANKS
State Conservationist

Attachments